



**State of Connecticut  
DIVISION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

**Testimony of the Division of Criminal Justice**

*In Support of:*

**H.B. No. 5485 (RAISED) An Act Concerning the Office of the Victim Advocate**

*Joint Committee on Judiciary  
March 19, 2010*

The Division of Criminal Justice respectfully recommends the Committee's Joint Favorable Report for H.B. No. 5485, *An Act Concerning the Office of the Victim Advocate*. The bill requires the Advisory Committee to the Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) to evaluate the performance of that office and to make recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the office in carrying out its responsibilities. The existing statute, Section 46a-13 (f) limits the advisory committee's ability to truly work with the Office of the Victim Advocate. It merely provides that the committee meet three times a year with the victim advocate and staff to review and assess (1) patterns of treatment and service, (2) policy implications of the findings subsequent to that review and assessment, and (3) necessary systemic improvements. The term "review and assess" has long been construed as limiting the role of the Advisory Committee to prevent the committee from making recommendations as a result of the review and assessment it must undertake. It is the Division's experience - which we understand is shared by most, if not all members of the Advisory Committee - that the committee would welcome a clearer definition of its role.

The Division of Criminal Justice offers these observations first and foremost out of our longstanding and ongoing concern for the needs and rights of the innocent victims of crime. Long before the OVA was created, Connecticut's prosecutors have advocated for the rights and needs of the victims of crime. In fact, while the OVA dates back to just 1996, the position of state prosecutor and the accompanying concern for victims dates to the very origin of public prosecution, a concept that originated in colonial Connecticut. Our commitment to the rights of victims is as strong today as it has ever been in the more than three centuries of public prosecution in this state. Our interest in H.B. No. 5485 is practical as well since the Advisory Committee includes among its membership a prosecutor, and as such the Division has had a continuing and ongoing opportunity to observe and to some degree play a role in the evolution of the OVA.

H.B. No. 5485 would provide the Advisory Committee with the opportunity to further ensure that crime victims are treated with dignity and respect by allowing the committee to compare statutes and practices and make recommendations as a result of such a comparison. This would apparently be the first such review since OVA was

established, and it would be especially timely given the current fiscal situation. OVA itself regularly reports to the Advisory Committee its concerns over budgetary and staffing constraints. H.B. No. 5485 provides a mechanism for examining whether those concerns could best be addressed by changing the structure of the office, i.e., placing it within the Office of the Attorney General, the Judicial Branch or the Division of Criminal Justice. It also provides an avenue for examining the role of the office, including whether it was ever intended to provide any direct services to victims and, if so, how its role and responsibilities varies from the Office of Victim Services in the Judicial Branch and community based victim advocacy groups.

The Division of Criminal Justice wishes to thank the Office of the Victim Advocate for its commitment to the rights of victims. We also thank those who have served alongside the prosecutor members of the Advisory Committee, and look forward to continued collaboration with the sole purpose of improving the delivery of services to and protecting the rights of the innocent victims of crime.

**Respectfully submitted,**

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